

As we enter November you are probably being bombarded by Christmas advertising and may even have done at least some of your Christmas shopping (I know some people who start theirs in the January sales although I'm a last-minute person myself). When you reach a certain age however, as all the new gadgets and this year's 'must have' toys appear, like me you probably start thinking back to earlier times when everything seemed so much simpler. I don't quite go back to the stocking with an orange, some nuts, a few sweets and a penny, but many presents were practical – scarf, gloves, hankies etc. – a book or that year's comic annual and a toy. A book or two is still a favourite present for me, a good murder mystery or fantasy novel or possibly one of those novelty books that you only ever seem to get as presents such as 'the book of heroic failures or 'lessons from history' or '365 reasons to be cheerful'.

I've recently received the Leprosy Mission catalogue which as well as all the usual Christmas cards and wrapping paper, decorations and Christmas hampers has lots of those sorts of books for sale, including ones called 'Humble Pie and Cold Turkey' and 'Spilling the beans on the Cat's Pyjamas' about the origins of some of the strange expressions we use in English. There are also quiz books and quiz games to help us while away some of those long winter evenings. At one time those evenings around the fire would have included telling stories and affirming the family or tribal identity by relating and remembering their shared history.

From the beginning of November up until Christmas is sometimes referred to as the season of remembering. As the long dark nights draw in, after the clocks have gone back at the end of October, we tend to spend more time indoors keeping warm and watching television, and reminiscing. And even TV gets in on the act, it is after all the 'season of repeats' before the big Christmas specials and blockbusters or traditional Christmas films and programmes. The remembering however is even built into our calendars. Halloween, or All Hallows (Saints) Eve, on the last day of October sets us off for the beginning of the season with All Saints Day on 1<sup>st</sup> November and All Souls Day on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, quickly followed by bonfire night/Guy Fawkes night on the 5<sup>th</sup> with its insistent poem urging, 'Remember, remember the 5<sup>th</sup> of November/ Gunpowder, treason and plot...' (or according to the TV ads of my childhood, 'light up the sky with Standard Fireworks!'). Next come Remembrance Day and Remembrance Sunday before the church's big one, Advent, leading us up to Christmas itself.

It seems quite fitting that among all this remembering some of those books I was talking about earlier are about forgetting! There is one called 'The Wonder Years', as in 'I wonder what I came up here for?' and 'I Used to Know That – stuff you forgot from school' and another about those 'Senior Moments' of forgetfulness. Sometimes it takes a real genius to forget! Albert Einstein once used a \$1,500 cheque he received from the Rockefeller Foundation as a bookmark for several months before losing the book. To keep their accounts straight the Foundation sent him a duplicate for which on receiving it, and having forgotten about the original, Einstein wrote back, 'What's this for?'. We're quite used to newspapers getting it wrong but in 1965 publisher Lionel Burleigh launched the *Commonwealth Sentinel* which he claimed would be 'Britain's most fearless newspaper', but on the day of its first issue he received a call to his hotel from the police saying 'there are 50,000 copies outside the hotel entrance and they are blocking the street.' He had completely forgotten to arrange for the newspaper's distribution. Its first issue was therefore its last.

In this season of remembering let us not forget to arrange for the distribution of the Good News, the news of Jesus Christ, born for us, coming into the world now and for always. Pass it on!  
Janet.